

Travellers: Our faith can save us from eviction

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HOPEFUL travellers believe their devotion to the Catholic church could thwart the forthcoming eviction.

Around 90 Irish traveller families at Dale Farm, in Crays Hill, have written to Basildon Council saying they don't believe it should legally be able to demolish several Roman Catholic shrines and gardens or a small chapel.

They have all been blessed by priests.

The shrines, which include statues of the Virgin Mary and Jesus with various ornaments set in bath tubs and other recycled objects, have been a feature of the huge camp since they moved in nine years ago.

The letter to the council states: "It remains our view that numbers of items present on the site you plan to demolish are legally situated and should not be tampered with or disturbed."

It added the travellers were concerned about what would happen to St Christopher's Chapel

- They claim shrines cannot be demolished
- Council urges families to move from Dale Farm

— a timber framed building put up on one of the plots. It was controversially by a grant from Essex County Council in 2008.

It added: "All of these sacred shrines have been blessed, as has the chapel, and many noted during the visits of their Graces the

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Bishops of Brentwood and Chelmsford, and other clergy last year.

"We must inform you that the dismantling and removal of these shrines and statues will be carefully monitored by a team of Catholic observers.

"If you do order their dismantling, can you assure us that the removal of the chapel and the holy shrines will be undertaken with the respect, decorum and care due to sacred items and to their Catholic owners?"

Tony Ball, council leader, said if the travellers moved off the land of their own accord they could take the statues with them, removing any uncertainty about their futures.

He added: "If they do refuse to move off, any issues such as this will be dealt with at the planning of the operation and be dealt with. We will treat everybody's property with respect."

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■ "Sacred" — one of the shrines put in an upright bath by the travellers
Picture: AL UNDERWOOD 3WDJL_8

MP urged to back campaign over jail

CAMPAIGNERS fighting plans to build a prison in Runwell have taken their fight to newly appointed Government whip Mark Francois.

Protesters from the No Prison in Runwell Action Group turned out in force, complete with their campaign battle van, to present a copy of their 3,500 strong petition to Mr Francois, Conservative MP for Rayleigh and Wickford.

They are hoping he will pass on the document to ministers in a bid to get them to put a stop to the jail, which is planned for the site of the old Runwell hospital, in Runwell Road, Wickford.

But, despite meeting with campaigners, Mr Francois would not give his views over the controversial Ministry of Justice proposals.

In their election manifesto the



■ We don't want it here — Barbara Crips, watched by fellow anti-prison campaigners, hands the petition to Mark Francois MP
Picture: AL UNDERWOOD BA31406_04

Tories vowed to increase the number of prison places to enable judges to dish out more custodial sentences.

Mr Francois said: "The previous Government gave little warning of their

intention to build a new prison in Runwell.

"The action group has asked to meet the council's chief executive and I have said I will write to him to forward this request and also so he is aware

of the number of petitioners on this subject."

A planning application for the jail — which would hold up to 1,500 convicts — is due to be considered by Chelmsford Borough Council in July.

Man is bailed on fencing charges

A MAN accused of handling stolen mobile phones, jewellery and games consoles has appeared in court.

Sam Bell, 18, formerly of Beambridge, Pitsea, faces three charges of assisting in the retention, removal or disposal of stolen goods.

He also faced two further charges of receiving stolen goods.

The charges all relate to incidents alleged to have happened in Basildon in March.

Bell did not enter a plea to the charges.

He was released on conditional bail and will next appear at Basildon Crown Court in July for a plea and case management hearing.

Under the terms of his bail, Bell must reside at a house in Marston Avenue, Dagenham and is banned from going out between 7pm and 7am.